

## The Vocative Case: Person, System and Asymmetry

Linguistic literature generally lacks deep analyses about vocative devices, classified either from a formal point of view as part of the ‘language system’, i.e. vocative case, or from a functional point of view as concerning ‘language use’ only. This dichotomy between “language system” and “language use” can not be understood as really existing, since the indissolubility of the points of view on the both is basic: it is the well-known Benvenistean opposition system *vs* discourse, which needs to be understood in terms of interface (Benveniste, 1946, 1956, 1970; Coseriu, 1955-1956; Venier, 2007). However, a misleading approach to the dichotomy seems to be the main reason of the lack of satisfying analyses for the vocative case. In this paper we will show how the vocative has been an item of theoretical discussion in western metalinguistic thinking since the Ancient Stoà because of its status within case systems: it is functionally different from the other case values (it is an extra-syntactic element and does not mark, as other case values do, syntactic-semantic relation between the noun phrases and other elements in the clause), but despite of this difference it is formally fully integrated in the nominal systems. Its function is rather a pragmatic one, namely placing an addressee in a given speech context. Because of this “detachment” between form and function the vocative case is identified as an anomaly within cases since the ancient thinkers, so that some scholars rule it out from cases because of its functional difference, while others do include it within cases by means of theoretical forcings as far as the functional description is concerned (Donati, 2009). Then, we will briefly outline the metalinguistic reflections about vocative by more and less ancient authors, whose remarks are particularly interesting for our subject (Apollonius Dyscolus, Priscian, Martin of Dacia, Hjelmslev). Furthermore, we will argue that the vocative can be defined as a “referentiality shifter”, namely a morphological tool to link the inherently not deictic referentiality of nouns to the extra-linguistic context, marking only the second person in opposition to first and third person. In this sense, the vocative establishes an asymmetry inside noun systems. Therefore within nouns we can outline a split II *vs* I and III person, different from Benveniste’s *corrélacion de personnalité*, since only the second person is marked. This split exemplifies the specific language feature of marking the functionally outstanding members of a certain category which occur inside a certain domain, in this case the second person within the domain of noun referentiality. Therefore, the anomaly of the vocative can be interpreted and solved by means of the Benvenistean concepts of person *vs* non-person and *discours vs langue*.

### Essential references

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